BETTER RED THAN ED:
Reflections on "Who is Edward Jay Epstein?"

by

Marian Kester

"Now everyone will know who I am!"--Lee Oswald, under interrogation in Dallas, November 23, 1963

"The most interesting question is, who was Lee Harvey Oswald?"--Ron Rosenbaum, interviewed on ABC, November 22, 1983

That does remain the big question. Not that it hasn't been answered. It took a while, admittedly, but it has been. Anthony Summers sums up: the pawn of renegade intelligence operatives and their Cuban-Mafia contacts. But Edward Jay Epstein counters: a dedicated Marxist on a KGB mission who possibly "over-stepped his mandate" in killing JFK. Two mirror-opposite views. A stalemate. But let's ask another question: Who is Edward Jay Epstein? Who is this well-connected graduate of Harvard and illustrious author of three books on the Kennedy assassination? Were I Epstein, I'd answer that by having recourse to a high-level former CIA officer--probably James Jesus Angleton, crucified during an Agency purge in the the year of our Lord 1974--who would hand down sober assurances that I, Epstein, had no relationship whatsoever, at any time, special or otherwise, with CIA. But that's just the problem: what is a genuine, honest journalist doing enjoying such privileged access to such formidable former agents? This peculiar access is one constant throughout all Epstein's works; another constant is the message, either fed (as by an unwitting conduit) or skillfully relayed (as by a witting disinformation channel), that emanates from the Angleton angle: Lee Harvey Oswald was a calculating left-wing thug controlled by Soviet agents like George de Mohrenschildt.(1)

Not having rarefied connections myself, I can

only venture a guess as to Epstein's wits, to wit: he's too polished and consistent to be merely a tool. His role seems to be that of neutralizing agent: his books are interjected as a kind of psychological counterstroke whenever the consensus seems dangerously close to crystallizing around the anti-Castro covert operations hypothesis. Inquest, after the Warren Commission report was published, aired CIA hints that Oswald's Soviet sojourn might bear closer scrutiny. Counterplot, during the Garrison investigation of the late 60's, portrayed the New Orleans District Attorney as the unbalanced dupe of certain red herrings. Epstein's most explicit effort to depict Oswald as a Kremlin operative (Legend) came out in 1978--just as the House Select Committee on Assassinations was scheduled to reopen the aborted inquiry into Kennedy's death.

The proof that Epstein's disinformation is not meant to be acted upon (at least not yet), but rather to confuse and blunt the impact of true revelations, is internal: nowhere does he advocate or even hint at political, much less military, retaliation against the Soviet Union or Cuba. In this curious passivity he perfectly resembles the supposed official U.S. government attitude at the time of the assassination: Oswald is a Commie nut, he's probably killed the president at the behest of Castro, if not of Khrushchev himself, but by all means let's pretend we're not aware of it, lest the Russians think we consider a minor thing like this a casus belli. And God forbid the Cubans should expect us to attack!

This is transparent nonsense. If there had been a shred of proof or any real higher-echelon belief that International Communism had eliminated the president of the United States on American soil, preparatory to God knows what move against our sovereignty, why did no one so much as watch the airports or seal the borders? No, the enemy was already within, and within days of the assassination U.S. foreign policy had executed a 180 degree turn. The prophesied "act of God" had leapfrogged Lyndon Johnson into the White House. A coup d'etat--you may as well carve it on your nose (before somebody else does). As for retaliation against the "intelligence" agencies responsible, those wonderful folks whose dedication to Freedom makes them the enemy of all free people everywhere, it is coming...

Another proof of what Epstein's really up to is also internal: alone among chroniclers of this sad period, he displays no feeling for his subjects. At the hands of Jim Garrison (2), Anthony Summers, Thomas Buchanan, Carl Oglesby and many others, even Oswald appears in an eerily sympathetic human light. Kennedy is located within a specific historical time he created and was created by, as a thinking, feeling, flesh-and-blood man, and the sense of loss, of senseless destruction, of irreparable disillusion is palpable in all these authors. Not so in Edward Jay Epstein. He evinces no sense of time, place or personality. Kennedy remains a dim ghost, Oswald an opaque automaton. Epstein reserves his indignation (borrowed) for the incompetents at CIA who ousted his paranoid mentor Angleton. Period.

Another striking thing about the Epstein opus, to an informed student of the Kennedy assassination, is how much he carefully leaves out. Like the Warren Commission, he chooses to ignore whatever facts, figures, persons and statements tend to detract from his argument. This is a time-honored disinformation technique which backfires only when your intended audience is too well acquainted with what's being omitted. Among Epstein's oversights: the Monterey School where Oswald was taught Russian, the office at notorious 544 Camp Street in New Orleans, the incriminating "Second Oswald" trail, Oswald's known associations with Mafia, CIA and anti-Castro Cuban activists, FBI obstruction of the case, the dubious Jack Ruby, and on and on. The point is, there's a hell of a lot you have to leave out if you want to toe the orthodox line, and more is being added all the time. The official story, discredited in the eyes of a vast majority of Americans, completely falls apart on any one of scores of individual

discrepancies, from the "magic bullet" to the behavior of Allen Dulles to the police sound tape made on Dealey Plaza. For the official story was so constructed that, if it can be shown that loony Oswald did not act alone, then anything goes: that one lie reveals the pack of lies that built the Warren Commission's house of cards. And Epstein's thesis lies in wait to pick up the pieces, prepared for that eventuality.

We don't really need to psychoanalyze Edward Jay Epstein's writings, though. The guy is an academician overtly in the "intelligence" field who delivers papers with titles like "Incorporating Analysis of Foreign Governments' Deception into the U.S. Analytic System." In this particular paper he defines what he calls "Type B deception": "distorting the 'interpretation' or 'meaning' of a pattern of data, rather than the observable data itself...The disinformation can be plausibly reinforced by statements to diplomats, journalists and other quasi-public sources...it [also] might conceivably employ functional paranoids, confidence men, magicians, film scenarists, or whomever else seemed appropriate to simulate whatever deception plot seemed plausible [sic]." (Quoted in Ron Rosenbaum, "The Shadow of the Mole," Harper's, October 1983.) In other words, if you can't control the release of information and fact, aim instead at clouding the mind of the "enemy", so he interprets falsely. Could a better nutshell description of the CIA self-defense mechanism be imagined?

"Type A" deception, defined by Epstein as "inducing an adversary to miscount or mismeasure an observable set of signals," does involve manipulation of the signals themselves. Legend does this from beginning to end with respect to the Nosenko case. Yuri Nosenko, a KGB officer, defected to the U.S. in 1964. It seems probable he came with some mission in mind, but what was it? To protect a "mole" high in the American ranks? Who could it be? Who couldn't it be? Contemplation of these riddles has driven a richly deserving generation of CIA analysts nuts, including Epstein's guru Angleton, who flipped out so badly he had to be relieved of

his duties. Epstein chooses to view Nosenko's mission more narrowly, for purposes of his own mission: he asserts the Russian came over to mislead the CIA about KGB interest in and handling of Oswald during the latter's 1959-1962 defection.

> Attorney David Belin: "I don't happen to believe that Oswald was part of any conspiracy, and as a matter of fact, the very fact that 12 years have passed and there really is no concrete evidence of a conspiracy is in itself evidence of the fact that there was no conspiracy."
> Reporter Daniel Schorr: "Or that it was a very good one."

On this perennial question of how a conspiracy involving so many and so much could have been effective, the answer simply is that it hasn't been. No one believes it. It covers up nothing. You're reading this here; you've read and heard far more elsewhere.(3) It's common knowledge. Hundred of books and articles have dealt with it. Dozens of people have "talked" all along, and many are still "talking" (though their death rate is actuarially rather high). The deadheads and figureheads on the Warren Commission were the only ones not listening; they hoped to interpose their own deaf ears and sightless eyes between the truth and the public. In the meantime they have been betrayed by their own shabby charade. Ah, what tangled webs we weave... There is scarcely a point on which the CIA and/or FBI and/or mob have not contradicted, recanted, jumped the gun on, or otherwise fouled up their own propaganda. The comedy of errors in Mexico City, September 1963, is especially amusing to the connoisseur of sinister cretinism...

So are we beating a dead horse here? To mangle a metaphor, you can't beat this one hard enough. In a way, of course, it is morbidly unhealthy to dwell on the martyred dead--Silkwood, King, Kennedy, the whole litany--because that gives you a cheap charge of "righteousness," as if by wallowing in regrets you'd done anything to further the ideals the martyrs died for. Moreover the message of modern

passion plays seems to be, "See? You raise your head against Them, and They'll lop it off. Lay low." But worse than regret would be to forget; worse than forbidden morbidity would be to let history die out. For without reference to this mindless slaughter of idealists and their ideals, the present peculiar repulsiveness of American life cannot be explained.

Also, the Dallas affair is more fascinating, dramatic, provocative, moving, uplifting, desperate, timeless, human, rich and real than any play or novel or story written since World War I. Through engaging it, one lives more fully in one's time-- in time itself. And its tremors continue to be felt. George de Mohrenschildt was murdered not long ago. Dan Rather is still on duty on behalf of the cover-up. Judith Campbell Exner only recently went public for the first time about how she was the mob's girl in place with JFK, in a position to spy on or compromise him at their direction. And here's one for the hardcore conspiracy buffs: "Maurice Bishop" was the cover name of the CIA handler controlling Antonio Veciana, Cuban exile founder of the commando team "Alpha 66" in the early 60's. Maurice Bishop was also the name of the president of Grenada deposed and murdered in a coup just before the U.S. invaded that little island last year. Coincidence--or conspiracy?

NOTES

(1) George de Mohrenschildt. Epstein's treatment of this character is a textbook example of Type B deception. De Mohrenschildt was a wealthy Polish-Russian aristocrat with Nazi sympathies and many intelligence connections during and after World War II. When he wasn't mixing in the affairs of the government-funded White Russian community in Dallas, his profession was that of "petroleum geologist," which got him frequent assignments abroad (Africa, Yugoslavia, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela) and subsequent debriefings by the CIA. He was in Guatemala on a "walking tour" when the Bay of Pigs invasion was being mounted from that country. De Mohrenschildt also displayed an

"unnatural interest" in Lee and Marina Oswald, acting as their fairy godfather on numerous occasions, finding lodging for Marina when Lee was "on call," etc. Yet Epstein boldly claims this was the pattern of a Soviet agent--he asks us to take a deep breath and believe that the classic CIA cover of the American oil business consultant should suddenly be assumed by a KGB operative, who then proceeded to function with impunity all over North and South America. Breathtaking. Even bolder is Epstein's claim that de Mohrenschildt committed suicide in 1977 because of his interviews with Epstein; actually, the day of his murder it had become publicized that the Senate inquiry was asking de Mohrenschildt to testify.

(2) Jim Garrison. Has endured one of the most incredible campaigns of vilification ever directed against a U.S. public figure. Not a charge has not been leveled at him--usually smarmily, through "reliable sources"--including alcoholism, madness, deviation, reckless publicity-seeking, and Mafia ties. In Counterplot Epstein repeats all the charges of untouchability, but reports as little of substance about the Garrison probe as he dares. And prudently so. Although it did not result in a conviction, that investigation did unearth invaluable evidence, leads which are still being followed up, e.g., the entire panorama of Oswald contacts in New Orleans like David Ferrie and Guy Banister. But the character assassination of Garrison was so effective that he may never be "rehabilitated," even in conspiracy theorists' eyes.

(3) Once you realize that CIA denials of involvement take the logical form of the sentence "All general statements are false, including this one," you're out of the woods.

MARIAN KESTER is a regular contributor to CRITIQUE. She writes about punk rock, Fnosticism, conspiracies, ufology, modern love, endangered species, mind control, negentropy, neobarbarism, and the movies. She presently lives in Washington.